



BELCHERTOWN POLICE DEPARTMENT

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Christopher G. Pronovost
Chief of Police

July 16, 2020

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz & Claire Cronin
Massachusetts House of Representatives
Beacon Ave.
Boston, MA

Dear Chair Aaron Michlewitz & Chair Claire Cronin,

Please accept the following testimony with regard to SB2820 - An Act to reform police standards and shift resources to build a more equitable, fair and just commonwealth that values Black lives and communities of color.

I can assure you that I, along with all chiefs of police within the Commonwealth, share in recognizing the need for police reform. I do, however, see many potential serious issues in SB2820 as it is currently written. I urge you to bring more of a police perspective to this conversation.

There are specific provisions of the Bill which would add extreme costs to existing police budgets, specifically the mandate of additional training and the administrative requirements of complying with all aspects of this Bill. In addition, the section relative to "*investigations and adjudications of complaints*" offers no specific guidelines on what complaints would be forwarded to the proposed committee. This vagueness leaves the door open to arbitrary and capricious cases being forwarded and determinations made in a similar manner.

Other problematic provisions of the Bill include the section on altering qualified immunity for public officials. With my 35 years of police experience as a police officer, I can tell you with certainty that this provision alone will destroy the ability for police officers to do their job. No police officer will put their personal liberty and property interests at stake in order to promote public safety. Policing will be relegated to a reactive and minimal-task occupation, with officers choosing to respond to, and engage in, only the most necessary tasks. Many officers, in anticipation of this provision, and because of fear, are already contemplating leaving the profession for the private sector or retirement. We will not be able to recruit the best officer candidates.

Passage of this Bill as written will also result in the termination of many important community-based policing initiatives. This includes little or no school involvement, a cease in substance abuse and mental health team response, and the abolishment of many other community-based programs and initiatives.

In closing, we, the police, recognize the need for change and reform. However, this is not something that can be rushed through your chamber due to political pressure. It is simply too important an issue and it demands great research, thought, and input from a plethora of community and law enforcement groups. I urge you to carefully consider the unintended consequences of this Bill as currently written.

Sincerely,



Christopher G. Pronovost
Chief of Police

Cc: Representative Thomas Petrolati
7th Hampden District